

Never Give Safety A Day Off

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The weather's turning nice and the days are getting longer. It's party time with everything from Frisbees to fast boats getting a summer workout. Good weather and long days make summer a prime time for vacations. With so much to do and enjoy, it's easy to overlook the "gotchas" that can easily sidetrack your summer plans with a hospital visit (or worse!). This year's 101 Critical Days of Summer safety campaign runs from May 28 through Sept. 3, and is themed "Never Give Safety a Day Off." The following suggestions are offered to help make your summer a fun and safe one.

On the road again

It's probably no surprise the greatest opportunity for gotchas is while you're on the road. No rocket science is needed here—it's just a matter of recognizing that with so many others doing the same thing, highways are a "target-rich" environment for gotchas. During last year's 101 Critical Days of Summer Safety, there were 38 fatal vehicle and motorcycle accidents. A look at those numbers provides some interesting insights. While privately owned vehicles accounted for 19 of those accidents, motorcycles accounted for almost as many with 17 fatal crashes. In addition, two Soldiers died while riding all-terrain vehicles. Although far fewer Soldiers ride motorcycles than drive cars or pickups, the high rate of fatalities reflects the findings of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Compared to car drivers, they found motorcyclists were 32 times more likely to die and six times more likely to be injured in a crash. One recent trend is the rising age of motorcycle riders killed in crashes. One reason suggested by Pat Hahn of the Minnesota Motorcycle Safety Center is that these riders are accustomed to the protection they've enjoyed inside automobiles and unaware of how vulnerable they are on a motorcycle.

Looking at these accidents, fatigue, driving under the influence and speeding were frequent contributing factors. The best protection Soldiers have is to plan for a safe trip (see TRiPS online at <https://crc.army.mil/trips>) and wear seat belts in POVs or helmets and proper personal protective equipment when motorcycling. Also, many of these accidents were caused by others on the road. Following simple defensive driving techniques—like the "two-second following rule"—can protect Soldiers from the mistakes of others.

Keeping summer fun, not fatal

Swimming is an attractive option when temperatures rise. However, five of the seven recreational fatal or permanently disabling accidents last year happened to Soldiers who were swimming or boating. Three of those Soldiers dove into shallow water, broke their necks and will spend the rest of their lives as quadriplegics. One Soldier, who couldn't swim, drowned when he slipped away from a friend teaching him to float and jumped off the diving board into a pool. Another died when he got off a paddleboat he was sharing with two other Soldiers, drifted away and drowned before he could be rescued. The U.S. Lifesaving Association's Web site at <http://www.usla.org/PublicInfo/safety.asp> offers good tips on water safety.



The two other fatalities involved a Soldier being struck by a vehicle while crossing a major thoroughfare on foot. Also, a young Soldier who was weightlifting at a gym collapsed, stopped breathing and died.

Ouches

There were 115 non-fatal off-duty accidents during last year's 101 Critical Days of Summer safety campaign. More than one-fourth of those accidents involved Soldiers proving the law of gravity still works. Here are a few examples:

- After drinking alcohol, a Soldier jumped from the 5th floor of his billets and suffered multiple injuries.

- A Soldier was attempting to sit on the edge of a barracks roof when he slipped and fell.

- While sleeping on a top bunk, a Soldier rolled off and hit the floor.

- A Soldier fell down his stairs after tripping over the family cat.

Aside from these examples, bicycle riding, basketball and softball were the top injury producers. For example, several bicycle accidents might have been prevented had riders looked ahead and identified hazards such as potholes, bumps in the road, loose gravel and fallen branches. Basketball is an aggressive game, but getting "air" time is less fun if you have to be carried away after a bad landing or a collision with another player. Also, softballs aren't soft if you inadvertently get nailed by a line drive, and break-away bases beat broken ankles every time.

So what can you do to stay safe while having fun this summer? That's simple, use CRM and think ahead. Plan your road trips so you have plenty of time to get to and from your destination without having to drive fatigued. Also, wearing a seat belt is the one protective measure you can always take; it's your ace-in-the-hole for safety. In addition, alcohol will not improve your skills behind the wheel. If you must hit the road after drinking, make sure you have a responsible, sober designated driver. If enjoying the water is part of your summer plans, make sure you can swim and always wear your life jacket when boating. Staying safe is mostly using good common sense. And isn't that what the five steps of CRM are about anyway?

- Identify the hazards
- Assess their dangers
- Develop a plan to reduce or eliminate those hazards
- Follow through with your plan
- Evaluate how well your plan worked

For more information on the Army's 101 Critical Days of Summer safety campaign, check out the U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center Web site at <https://crc.army.mil>.

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